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ABSTRACT

Data were collected from 93 journalism students before and after the 1978 Ohio gubernatorial election to determine how selectivity in exposure to information was influenced by information utility, fatalism (locus of control), past history of reinforcement, and political party identification. Results showed that past history of reinforcement and perceived utility of information, particularly the latter, were the dominant predictors of respondents' selective exposure to political information. On the other hand, respondents' levels of fatalism and political party identification played little discernible role in predicting information selectivity. The newspaper was the medium consistently chosen as the most important information source, followed by television, magazines, radio, and interpersonal discussions. Campaign literature printed and distributed by political candidates was rated far lower as an information source than might be expected during an election campaign. The observed relationship between information utility and selectivity, and the accompanying interactions between personality and situational variables, supported a conceptualization of selective exposure as a motivational procedure by which individuals asserted control over informational environments to meet informational needs. (RI)

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SELECTIVITY IN EXPOSURE TO INFORMATION
CHANNELS DURING A GUBERNATORIAL ELECTION

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SELECTIVITY IN EXPOSURE TO INFORMATION CHANNELS DURING A GUBERNATORIAL ELECTION

The conceptualization and empirical status of selective exposure remain indecisive, if not controversial. Several reviews of the research literature in this area indicate that the usual conception of selective exposure as a means of avoiding uncongenial information--as originally proposed by Hyman and Sheatsley (1947) and formally stated in the cognitive dissonance theory by Festinger (1957)--lacks any convincing empirical support (Freedman and Sears, 1965; Sears and Freedman, 1967; Donohew and Palmgreen, 1971). Yet "motivated" selectivity continues to be conceptualized in terms of this avoidance notion.

Researchers who agree that this motivated selectivity, as traditionally conceived, lacks empirical validity tend to hold on to "de facto" selectivity, which Sears and Freedman (1967) define as "audience bias in the direction of agreeing to an unusual extent with the communicator's stand on an issue relevant to the communication" (p. 196). For Katz (1968), "de facto" selectivity, is said to occur when "circumstances, rather than motives, conspire to expose people to congenial communication" (p. 789). Thus, this conception of selectivity does not provide any explanation for the communication behavior but merely says that communication audiences are usually composed of persons who share the viewpoint of the communicator. But this conception seems to beg the question as to why audiences are biased or share the viewpoint of the communicator.

It is clear that, as a number of researchers (Sears and Freedman,

1967; Katz, 1968; Schramm, 1973; Oskamp, 1977) have observed, neither of the two current conceptions of selective exposure seems to capture the essence of this communication behavior. People do not necessarily avoid uncongenial information nor expose themselves to only congenial information, as invariably contended under dissonance theory's conception of motivated selectivity, neither do they "unconsciously" agree with communicators without any motivation, as usually hypothesized or implied in de facto selectivity. In view of this, a departure from these two conceptions of selectivity seems to be called for. Instead of viewing selective exposure in either the avoidance or the non-motivational mold, it may be more fruitful to conceptualize it as a motivational aspect of the individual's communication behavior, meant to satisfy a felt need--as recent empirical research literature in this area seems to suggest.

The present study conceives of selective exposure in this functionally motivated perspective. It is postulated here that, to the extent a person perceives an item of information to be useful in solving a problem or meeting a felt need, he or she will be likely to select that information in preference to other available information. This decision to select the information will also be dependent upon the individual's past experience with such or similar information, his/her personality characteristics, and the situational context in which the information is available. Selective exposure is conceptualized here as a purposive behavior, influenced by perceived utility of information, past history of reinforcement, level of fatalism, and the situational context of party identification.

Thus, psychological characteristics of the individual (the importance of which is emphasized by researchers who postulate "motivated" selectivity) and situational characteristics (e.g. Katz's "circumstances") are regarded here as working with yet a third set of variables--perceived characteristics of the object of exposure--to account for observed selectivity.¹

In this view, the "congeniality" of message content is regarded as but one of a larger set of variables that might instruct selective exposure. Indeed, all message characteristics are regarded as but one set of variables pertaining to the object of exposure in a three-sets-of-variables orientation situation.

Selectivity, then, could be instructed by variables in the orientation situation other than those pertaining to the message or object of observation--and selectivity based on characteristics of the object of observation could be responsive to variables other than message congeniality. In this study selectivity behavior will be observed with regard to the media by which messages are presented (newspapers, television, etc.) rather than with regard to characteristics of message content. Several previous researchers (Belson and Barban, 1969; Grunig, 1969; Chaffee and McLeod, 1973) have defined various forms of information selectivity in terms of respondents' preferences for communication channels or sources.

Perceived information usefulness has consistently been found to significantly affect selectivity in exposure. Among the early studies establishing the importance of this factor were Jecker's (1964) and Canon's (1964) which also disconfirmed the avoidance hypothesis under dissonance theory. Canon varied information

usefulness and self-confidence and found that when information was perceived to be highly useful, a highly confident individual preferred to expose himself/herself to it, regardless of the amount of dissonance said to be experienced. In another experiment also varying confidence, Jecker reported that when information was perceived to be useful, the individual did not avoid it, regardless of the degree of dissonance experienced. On the basis of these findings, Festinger (1964) has re-stated the aspect of dissonance theory pertaining to selectivity by saying that the theory's predictions regarding selective exposure cannot hold when the individual perceives information to be useful, or when certain personality variables, such as confidence, are taken into account.

Many researchers working outside the realm of dissonance theory have likewise reported the importance of information utility as a predictor of selective exposure. For example, Shipley (1976) asked her respondents why they chose to pay attention to certain mass media sources and content in preference to others equally available. They replied that the sources and contents selected were "personally relevant," "of interest," and "aligned" with their efforts to meet a number of stated needs. In like manner, Wang (1977) found that information utility was the best predictor of her respondents' selection of certain newspaper content categories, in preference to others.

In addition to self confidence reported by Canon (1964) and Jecker (1964) working within the framework of dissonance theory, other personality variables have been found by other researchers outside dissonance theory to influence information selectivity

behavior. Kassarian (1965) found support for his hypothesis that persons having other-directed orientations would selectively expose themselves to messages espousing other-directed values. Working with Rokeach's (1960) open- and closed-mindedness model, Donohew, Parker, and McDermott (1972) reported that open-minded subjects selected both "pleasant" and "aversive" information, whereas closed-minded subjects avoided "aversive" information. Similar findings have been reported for the personality variable of fatalism. For example, Harvey, Barnes, Sperry, and Harris (1974) found that internally-oriented (less fatalistic) subjects perceived significantly greater choice in a choice situation when a decision involved positive actions than did externally-oriented (more fatalistic) subjects. They also found that internals perceived significantly greater choice when available options were similar in attractiveness than did externals. Harvey and Harris (1975) have reported a replication of the results of this study. Likewise, Harris and Harvey (1975) found that persons who attributed to themselves the consequences of their own decisions (less fatalistic persons) perceived significantly more choices in their environments than did those who attributed such consequences to outside forces (high fatalists).

Among a number of factors which Freedman and Sears (1965) and Sears and Freedman (1967) suggested in their extensive reviews of the selectivity literature to be critical in determining selective exposure to information was past history of exposure. The kind of experience which the individual has had in the past with a particular type of information might play a role in whether or not he or she

will now select that information. If past experience with the information was rewarding, then there is a high probability that similar information will be selected when encountered. On the other hand, if past experience with the information was not rewarding, the probability of selection may not be as high. Time and again, party identification has been shown to exert a strong influence on information selectivity, especially with respect to political information (Schramm and Carter, 1959; Freedman and Sears, 1965; Sears and Freedman, 1967; Sanders and Pace, 1977). A majority of mass media audience members choosing to expose themselves to information pertaining to a political candidate or political issue has usually been found to comprise persons affiliated with, or expressing sympathies for, a particular political organization.

In sum, information utility, fatalism, and party identification have been found at one time or another by many previous researchers to influence selectivity in exposure to information, and past history of reinforcement is strongly suggested to likely influence such selectivity. However, the four independent variables have never, to our knowledge, been used together in any previous study to predict to selective exposure. But many of the major reviews of the literature in this research area have in various ways suggested that such combination of these and other similar variables might be helpful in the understanding of selectivity (Sears and Freedman, 1967; Katz, 1968; Donohew and Palmgreen, 1971).

The theoretical framework which subsumes the four predictor variables and the criterion variable of selectivity is Julian Rotter's (1954, 1966) social learning theory of personality. In

this theory, choice behavior is regarded as purposive--determined by locus of control, reinforcement value, past history of reinforcement, and the psychological situation in which the behavior occurs. Also, choice behavior is regarded as learned and the individual's personality characteristic represented by locus of control is not regarded as inborn, but rather as acquired through socialization and experience, and so, modifiable by experience. Rotter (1975) has stressed that the predictive efficacy of the theory is more likely to be observed when the independent variables are used together to predict to choice behavior than when used in isolation.

The theory predicts that choice behavior is likely to be maximized when locus of control is internal rather than external, when reinforcement value is high rather than low, when the history of reinforcement deals with reward rather than punishment, and when the psychological situation is conducive to the particular behavior in question.

This particular set of conditions would, however, pertain only for particular persons in particular situations. What might we generally expect regarding relations among these independent variables? The theory predicts that the relationship between at least two of the variables--locus of control (fatalism in this study) and reinforcement value (information utility in this study)--will be multiplicative (Rotter, Chance, and Phares, 1972). Generally, then, we would expect relations among the independent variables in the orientation situation to be interactive, rather than additive.

In social learning theory, the nature of the individual's locus

of control belief gives an indication to the person's personality characteristic. If he or she believes that reinforcement is contingent upon his or her own action, this is referred to as belief in "internal control," while if reinforcement is believed to be dependent upon luck, chance, fate, or powerful others, the belief is known as an "external control" belief. Locus of control--a social psychological term--is usually called "fatalism" in mass communication research. In social learning theory, the psychological situation could either be implicit in the other variables, or be substantively measured. In the present study, it will be substantively measured, and the equivalents of locus of control, reinforcement value, past history of reinforcement and psychological situation are respectively fatalism, information utility, past history of reinforcement, and party identification.

The hypotheses tested in the study were:

- H₁: The correlations of fatalism at time one, of information utility at time one, of past history of reinforcement at time one, and of party identification at time one, with selective exposure at time two will each be significantly greater than zero.

Based on past research reviewed and on insight from social learning theory, each of the predictor variables is expected to influence selective exposure over time.

- H₂: Selective exposure is a function of the collective influence of fatalism, information utility, past history of reinforcement, and party identification.

Hypothesis 2 is consistent with predictions of social learning theory and with Rotter's (1975) contention that an optimum prediction of choice behavior would require a combination of the predictor variables in a single equation.

METHOD

Data were collected at two points in time during the 1978 general elections in which Ohio's Republican incumbent Governor James A. Rhodes was being challenged by his Democratic Lieutenant Governor Richard F. Celeste. The first collection was accomplished on November 2nd and 3rd, four days before the November 7th election day. The second collection followed about two weeks later, on November 16th and 17th. One hundred and fifty-nine undergraduate students at Kent State University took part in the first data collection. During the second collection, 93 out of the 159 again completed the study instrument. Thus 93 students provided data at both points in time for use in this study. In each of the two collections, the students completed the study instrument in two intact classes, 63 of them in an introduction to journalism class and the remaining 30 in a history of American journalism class. About 72 percent of the students indicated their majors to be journalism, speech, or telecommunication, while the rest mentioned arts, business administration, education, natural science, social science, and "undecided." They were overwhelmingly freshmen and sophomores.

Anonymity was stressed in order to reduce panel sensitization and social desirability response set by instructing respondents to "write only the last five digits of your ID number (as a form of identification) so that the computer can score your answers." Time 1 and Time 2 questionnaires were thus matched using the ID numbers.

Among a few other variables not used in the present paper, the questionnaire measured selective exposure, fatalism, information utility, past history of reinforcement, and party identification, defined as follows:

Fatalism: This is a person's belief that reinforcement is contingent upon either his/her own action (low fatalism) or luck, chance, fate, or powerful others (high fatalism). Four Likert-type questionnaire items adapted from Rotter's (1966) Internal-External Control Scale, each of which had seven response categories ranging from "agree very strongly" to "disagree very strongly," were used to measure the variable. A person's total score on the four items constituted his/her index of fatalism. With this variable scored in the "external" direction as usual, a high total score meant a high level of fatalism, whereas a low total score represented a low level of fatalism.

Information Utility: This is a person's stated usefulness or helpfulness of information from television, radio, newspaper, magazines, and other people in knowing more about the issues and candidates in the election in question. Five Likert-type questionnaire items, three with five response categories ranging from "very useful" to "very useless" and the remaining two also with five response categories which ranged from "very helpful" to "very worthless," were used to assess information utility. Each respondent's total score on the five items constituted his or her index of information utility.

Past History of Reinforcement: The extent to which issues and candidates which a person supported in the past is stated to have met the person's expectations or served the person's needs

constitutes past history of reinforcement. Four Likert-type questionnaire items with five response categories ranging from "always" to "never" were used to measure the variable, and a total score on the four items represented each respondent's measure of the variable.

Party Identification: This is the individual's stated affiliation through registration to a political organization. One questionnaire item asked the respondent if he or she was a registered voter, with response choices of "yes" or "no." The second item asked respondent to state whether he or she was registered as a Democrat, an Independent, a Republican, or "Other." Responses to these items provided the bases for sorting respondents according to party identification.

Selective Exposure: Selective exposure here is a person's stated preference for certain channels of communication rather than others available as sources of information on political issues and political candidates. Two questionnaire items were used to measure this variable. One asked respondents to indicate among newspapers, television, radio, books, magazines, discussion with other people, movies, materials printed by politicians, and "other" the channels from which they got most of their information on "current political events specifically." The second item asked them to rate these communication channels "in terms of their importance to you in obtaining information on political candidates." In the post-election questionnaire, this item was slightly modified to "in terms of their importance to you in obtaining information on political candidates for last week's election." Again, each person's total score on

these two items constituted his/her index of selective exposure. But unlike the situation in the other variables, if a person marked the nine communication channels in his/her responses, such a person got a total score of zero, since responses on this variable were meant to be selective.

Cross-lagged correlational procedures² were used to test Hypothesis 1, while multiple regression³ was used to test Hypothesis 2.

RESULTS

The main results of the analyses are presented in Figure 1 for Hypothesis 1 and Table 1 for Hypothesis 2. The results of the analyses, with the predictor variables all used as continuous variables, provide partial support for the two hypotheses. While for two of the predictor variables the results are as expected, for the two others, specifically fatalism and party identification, the results are different from what were expected in terms of predictions made by social learning theory and also in terms of empirical research in the area.

FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

Hypothesis 1: Each of the four predictor variables--fatalism, information utility, past history of reinforcement, and party identification--was expected to significantly influence selective exposure. In the cross-lag model for each set of relationships this influence was expected to hold rather than the reverse plausible

one of selective exposure at Time 1 influencing each of these four variables significantly at Time 2. For information utility, the cross-lagged correlation of .749 between that variable at Time 1 and selective exposure at Time 2 is far larger than the opposite cross-lagged correlation of .057 between selective exposure at Time 1 and utility at Time 2. With the no-cause baseline coefficient of .007 subtracted from both values, the coefficient of .742 above the baseline is statistically significant beyond the .001 level of probability. Also, the cross-lagged correlation of .377 between past history of reinforcement at Time 1 and selective exposure at Time 2 is .358 points above the no-cause baseline coefficient of .019. This is far larger than the opposite cross-lagged correlation of -.024, and is statistically significant at .001 level of probability.

Thus, for each of these two sets of relationships, the rival hypothesis of a reverse causal influence flow being from selective exposure at Time 1 to the hypothesized predictor variable at Time 2 did not materialize. This rival hypothesis is of course not derived from social learning theory, but rather is a logical reality of the cross-lagged panel correlation model. On the other hand, the observed outcomes which lend support to Hypothesis 1 are consistent with predictions made by social learning theory and with previous research.

For fatalism and party identification, however, the hypothesized relationships do not hold.⁴

Hypothesis 2: The multiple regression test of Hypothesis 2 indicates that the four predictor variables together accounted for

58 percent of the variance in selective exposure. This amount of explained variance represents a moderate collective influence of the variables on selective exposure, considering that the variables were measured in a field setting within relatively close points in time. However, whereas the individual contributions of variance to the total pool by each of the predictor variables was

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

expected to be relatively substantial and possibly significant, only the contributions of 43 percent by information utility and 14 percent by past history of reinforcement out of the total 58 percent are statistically significant (Table 1). The remaining 1 percent contributed by party identification is not statistically significant, and the contribution made by fatalism is less than 1 percent. The results here again demonstrate the dominant influences of information utility and past history of reinforcement relative to the other predictor variables, as was the case in the cross-lagged correlation analyses.

Rotter's prediction of interactive relations among the independent variables was checked by combining these variables in two-way, three-way, and four-way interaction models and running these through the regression program to predict to selective exposure. All the

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

ten interaction regressions but one were statistically significant

(Table 2), and the variances accounted for in selective exposure by four of them were each in the 80's--substantially higher than the variance of 58 percent explained by the additive model.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In both the cross-lagged correlation and multiple regression analyses, past history of reinforcement and, much more so, perceived utility of information clearly were the dominant predictors of respondents' selectivity in exposure to political information from a given point in the campaign period for the Ohio governorship through the election when James A. Rhodes was re-elected to an unprecedented fourth term as governor. The experience which respondents had with political candidates and political issues in the past--whether issues which they supported in the past got approved or rejected, whether the candidates they supported got elected or defeated, and whether such candidates when elected lived up to respondents' expectations or disappointed them--played a significant role in predicting their levels of selectivity in exposure to political information during the election. Also, respondents' perception of the usefulness of available information in enabling them to know more about political issues and political candidates in the election played an even greater role in predicting this level of information selectivity.

On the other hand, respondents' levels of fatalism and political party identification, in and of themselves, played little to no discernible role in predicting their information selectivity during the period in question. Fifty-nine percent of the respondents in

the study scored low on the fatalism scale, i.e., they were low fatalists, while 41 percent scored high on the scale as high fatalists. This greater number of low fatalists was perhaps responsible for the positive .010 correlation between fatalism at Time 1 and selective exposure at Time 2. However, even though low fatalists tended to behave more selectively than did high fatalists, as the positive correlation indicates, low fatalists were not sufficiently greater in number to translate this tendency into a statistically significant correlation coefficient--previous research shows that low fatalists perceive more choices in choice situations and behave more selectively than do high fatalists (Davis and Phares, 1967; Harvey, Barnes, Sperry, and Harris, 1974; Harvey and Harris, 1975). Also, previous research has shown that college students low in fatalism are usually far greater in number than their counterparts high in fatalism (Joe, 1971; Rotter, 1966), and presumably this inclination toward less fatalistic outlook on life grows as a student's tenure in the college environment progresses. In this respect, the result found in this study with regard to fatalism could be interpreted to mean that the predominantly freshmen and sophomores who took part in the study were yet to increase and solidify their internal (low fatalistic) orientation sufficiently to make a significant difference in the observed outcomes on selectivity in exposure to information. The results of both the cross-lagged correlation and regression analyses are in this regard consistent with previous research findings on the role of fatalism (Grunig, 1971; Edeani, 1979).

With respect to the outcomes on party identification, the negative signs on the two cross-lagged correlations in model number 4 of Figure 1 indicate that the higher the level of respondents' party identification the lower their selectivity in behavior toward channels of political information. Stated differently, the results would suggest that as the individual becomes more strongly attached to a political organization he or she indiscriminately exposes himself/herself to all manner of available channels of political information. This interpretation would, however, be contrary to previous research findings which indicate that strong party adherents tend to be highly selective in their exposure to political information. Thus, what seems to be a more plausible explanation of the results is the relatively low level of affiliation to political organizations reported by students in the study, for only about 44 percent said they were registered party members. In this respect, the majority of respondents who indicated no commitment to any party apparently kept an open mind, in terms of party orientation, regarding political information channels to which they exposed themselves during the election period.

In general terms, however, the respondents were quite clear-cut as to which channels of political information they preferred, as the data in Table 3 indicate. It is clear from that table that the newspaper was far and away the medium which the students con-

TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

sistently chose the most often for their information on political

events and issues, as well as on political candidates. Next in importance was television, followed by magazines (presumably the popular newsweekly magazines), radio, and interpersonal discussions. Surprisingly, campaign literature printed and distributed by political candidates were rated far lower than one would ordinarily expect as sources of information during the election season.

Perhaps, some more comment on the data in Table 3 and related information on selectivity as observed is in order. A key issue in the traditional notion of selective exposure has been the argument that an item or channel of information perceived by the individual to be uncongenial to his/her views and attitudes is avoided--while only the congenial one is selected. But a great deal of research evidence shows that the avoidance argument does not hold in real life, and that what actually happens is that people tend to expose themselves less to unpreferred information or sources of information and to expose themselves more to preferred ones. Such a pattern of selectivity is illustrated in the present study.

Each of the two questionnaire items measuring selective exposure had nine information channels from which to choose, with the respondent's most preferred channel assigned a value of 9 and the least preferred a value of 1. If every one of the 93 respondents had chosen only the most preferred source on each count and avoided the rest, every one of them would have scored a maximum of 18 points, with the same 18 points being the mean score for the sample. In actual fact, however, the sample means were 46.94 at Time 1 and 54.82 at Time 2, clearly indicating multiple exposure behaviors by the students rather than avoidance. Table 3 also demonstrates this

multiple exposure behavior in selectivity. Even in situations which might ordinarily be expected to be conducive to avoidance behavior, people very often do not necessarily avoid unpleasant information or sources of information, but rather feel challenged or motivated to expose themselves to the information or source (Pyszka, 1967; Guerrero, 1969; Gibbons and Wicklund, 1976; Bertrand, 1979).

Thus, research on selectivity behavior must look beyond the range of variables focused on by researchers holding on to dissonance theory's conception of motivated selectivity. Furthermore, it is important that relations among sets of variables in the orientation situation also be examined.

Not only was information utility--a variable outside the dissonance theory purview--the strongest individual predictor of selectivity, its interaction with history of reinforcement yielded a multiplicatively higher prediction to selectivity than would be expected in terms of the individual contributions of these two independent variables.

On the whole, the results of the study as displayed in the models in Figure 1 seem to exhibit a moderate to high degree of stationarity, which Cook and Campbell (1979) contend is conducive to a maximum justification for interpretability of data. "Stationarity" means that the synchronous correlations in the cross-lag models at Time 1 are close or similar to the synchronous correlations at Time 2.

However, the autocorrelation (test-retest correlation) coefficient for selective exposure is surprisingly low, and it is

difficult to pinpoint the reason for such a low relationship. This is the more puzzling when one realizes that the internal reliability coefficients for the Time 1 and Time 2 selective exposure scales are as high as the coefficients for the other variables in the study--.889 and .970 respectively. Another shortcoming of the study is perhaps the relatively short time interval between the Time 1 and Time 2 data collection points--two weeks. Just as too long an interval may distort the relationships of variables in a panel study, too short an interval may prevent the observation of optimum relationships among variables in the cross-lagged panel correlation study. However, the decision concerning the length of this interval is a ticklish problem which confronts every researcher using the panel approach to data collection and which is at best usually an arbitrary decision (Cook and Campbell, 1979). In the present study, the first data collection was made at the peak of the election campaign and the second followed some ten days after the election--just enough time before communication activities connected with the election would begin to be forgotten by respondents. In other words, the data collection points were considered to be perhaps the best possible times necessary in the situation.

The results of the study, especially with respect to the influences of information utility, resemble findings reported in the uses and gratifications research perspective. But to the extent that uses and gratifications can be regarded as a theoretical model, the findings reported here cannot be fully accommodated within that model, for its key variables and the nature of their relationships are yet to be clearly specified (Blumler and Katz, 1974; Blumler,

1979; Swanson, 1979; Severin and Tankard, 1979). Except for information utility, it has little to say about the other variables used in the study. It is thus still within the framework of social learning theory that the results have been appropriately considered. What may be regarded as a strength of the study is the assessment of the substantive influences of past history of reinforcement, a variable which has been repeatedly stressed in social learning theory to be a very important one (Rotter, 1966, 1967, 1975; Rotter, Chance, and Phares, 1972) but which researchers working within the theory have often failed to measure. While acknowledging the important roles of locus of control (fatalism) and the psychological situation in the theory, Rotter has stated that past history of reinforcement and reinforcement value (information utility in this study) are of greater importance. Says he (Rotter, 1975):

The concept of internal versus external control of reinforcement...seems to be referred to by some investigators as the major or central concept in social learning theory. It is not...The nature of the reinforcement itself, whether positive or negative, the past history sequence and patterning of such reinforcements; and the value attached to the reinforcement are obviously important and probably more crucial determinants of behavior (pp. 56-57).

Thus, the results reported in this study are not surprising, considering the limitations of the sample with respect to fatalism and party identification as discussed above. Consistent with predictions of the theory, past history of reinforcement and information utility did demonstrate their more crucial efficacy in predicting choice behavior, and fatalism and party identification, in and of themselves, would probably have also contributed significantly

to the determination of this choice behavior had a large number of persons in the sample been sufficiently low in fatalism and also had they been avowed political party adherents. Thus, a repeat of this study with a non-college sample might provide an opportunity to observe more effective roles of fatalism and party identification in determining selectivity in exposure to political information.

Meanwhile, the results of the study suggest that selective exposure does not have to be a means of avoiding "unpleasant" information. While "pleasantness"--or its opposite--count for something in explaining selectivity, it does not account for all of it. How much, and to what extent, it and other variables count for in particular orientation situations is a question for empirical investigation.

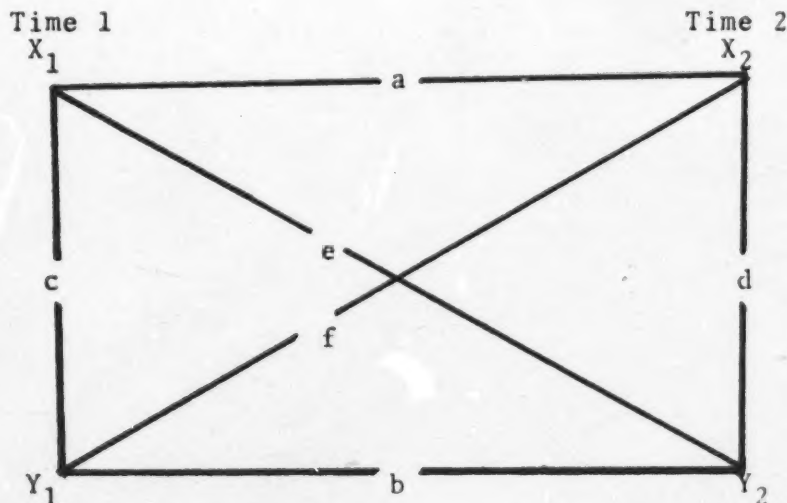
With regard to a conceptualization of selectivity behavior, regardless of particular situations, outcomes of this study argue for a more general approach. The observed relationship between information utility and selectivity, and the accompanying interactions between personality and situational variables support a conceptualization of selective exposure as a motivational procedure by which the individual asserts control over his/her informational environment with a view to meeting his or her informational needs.

NOTES

¹See M.-Daniel Jacobovitch, "The Orientation Situation: A Trivariate Approach." Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Washington, 1975, for the explication of a three-sets-of-variables approach to the orientation situation.

²This data analytic technique is a means of testing for causal relations among variables. See Donald C. Pelz and Frank M. Andrews, "Detecting Causal Priorities in Panel Study Data," American Sociological Review, 1964, 29, 836-848; Richard M. Rozelle and Donald T. Campbell, "More Plausible Rival Hypotheses in the Cross-Lagged Panel Correlation Technique," Psychological Bulletin, 1969, 71, 74-80; W.D. Crano, D.A. Kenny, and D.T. Campbell, "Does Intelligence Cause Achievement?: A Cross-Lagged Panel Analysis," Journal of Educational Psychology, 1972, 63, 258-275. To test Hypothesis I, the Pearson product moment intercorrelations were computed for each of the four predictor variables at Time 1 and Time 2 with selective exposure also at Time 1 and Time 2.

In the cross-lagged correlation model, the correlation of interest "e" ($r_{X_1Y_2}$) would represent a support for Hypothesis 1 if it is positive and larger than "f," i.e., $r_{Y_1X_2}$. See Rozelle and Campbell above, and Leo A. Goodman, "Causal Analysis of Data From Panel Studies and Other Kinds of Surveys," American Journal of



Sociology, 1973, 78, 1135-1191. If statistically significant, this difference would represent a causal effect of the predictor variable on selective exposure. But before each of the cross-lagged correlations could be meaningfully interpreted, a baseline coefficient constituting no causal relationship has to be calculated for the predictor variable, since the correlations are affected by the time lapse

between Time 1 and Time 2 interviews. The baseline coefficients were obtained with the following formula (see Rozelle and Campbell, 1969 above):

$$\text{Baseline} = \frac{c+d}{2} \sqrt{\frac{a}{R_a} * \frac{b}{R_b}}$$

where: a and b are test-retest or time-lagged correlations, and c and d are synchronous correlations in Figure 1. R_a and R_b are respectively Time 1 and Time 2 internal reliability coefficients for each of the predictor variables.

In addition to each of the cross-lagged correlations ("e") being significantly larger than "f," it must also be larger than the computed baseline coefficient for the observed relationships to lend support to the stated hypothesis. An important aspect of the structure of the cross-lagged correlation model is the plausibility of the relationship directly the reverse of that hypothesized. In each of the models in Figure 1, the relationship "f" has a chance to be larger than the hypothesized relationship "e." That is why the specification of "e" in the hypothesis needs to be strongly grounded in theory and, as much as possible, also in empirical research (Crano, Kenny, and Campbell, 1972) so that "e" would have the greater probability of exceeding both the relation "f" and the no-causation baseline coefficient. In this way, correlation "e" would be regarded as having met some of the important assumptions underlying causality in the cross-lagged panel analysis: relationship, functionality, and time-order (Blalock, 1964; Pelz and Andrews, 1964; Heise, 1970) in each case.

³In terms of the predictive efficacy of the independent variables which Rotter postulates in social learning theory, and in accordance with which Hypothesis 2 is formulated, the multiple regression analysis appeared to be the logical program for testing the hypothesis. Furthermore, since there was a slight dissimilarity in the scales used in measuring the variables, the regression analysis seemed to be more appropriate than ordinary analysis of variance--see Fred N. Kerlinger and Elazar J. Pedhazur, Multiple Regression in Behavioral Research, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1973.

In view of the relative importance of the predictor variables in influencing choice behavior as suggested by social learning theory, the variables were entered into the regression program in a hierarchical sequence, with past history of reinforcement entered first, followed by information utility, party identification, and fatalism in that order. In the interest of consistency, the same Time 1 data used in the predictor variables to test for causal relationships in the cross-lag analyses were used in the regression analysis to predict to selective exposure at Time 2. The data were standardized into Z-scores before being used in the regression analysis in order to attain meaningful comparability of individual variable contributions to the total percentage of explained variance in selective exposure.

⁴The expected outcome of $rx_1y_2 > ry_1x_2$ for fatalism appears at a first glance to have been reversed to $rx_1y_2 < ry_1x_2$, since the negative cross-lagged correlation coefficient of $-.071$ between selective exposure at Time 1 and fatalism at Time 2 looks larger in magnitude than the opposite cross-lagged correlation coefficient of $.010$. In reality, however, $rx_1y_2 > ry_1x_2$ still seems to hold, since $-.071$ subtracted from $.010$ leaves $rx_1y_2 = .081$, which is larger than $-.071$. With the no-causation baseline coefficient of $-.007$ subtracted from the two original coefficients, the values of rx_1y_2 and ry_1x_2 are respectively $.017$ and $-.064$. Nevertheless, the positive and larger value of $.017$ for rx_1y_2 is not statistically significant, and so does not lend support to Hypothesis 1. For party identification, the two cross-lagged correlations, rx_1y_2 and ry_1x_2 , are negative as $-.137$ and $-.102$ respectively, and with the no-causation baseline coefficient of $-.089$ subtracted from each, the remaining values are respectively $-.048$ and $-.013$. Again, the larger value of $-.048$ for rx_1y_2 is not statistically significant.

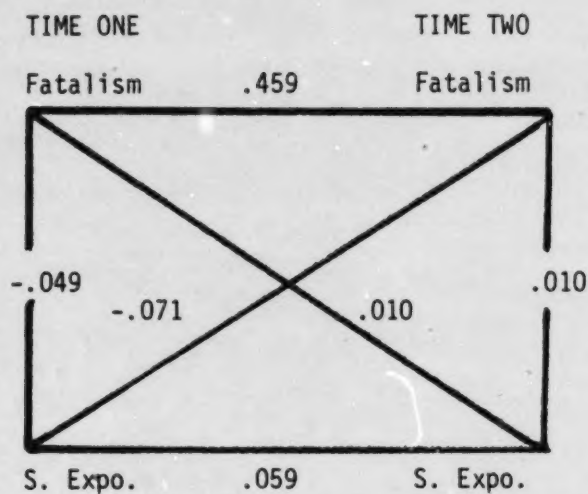
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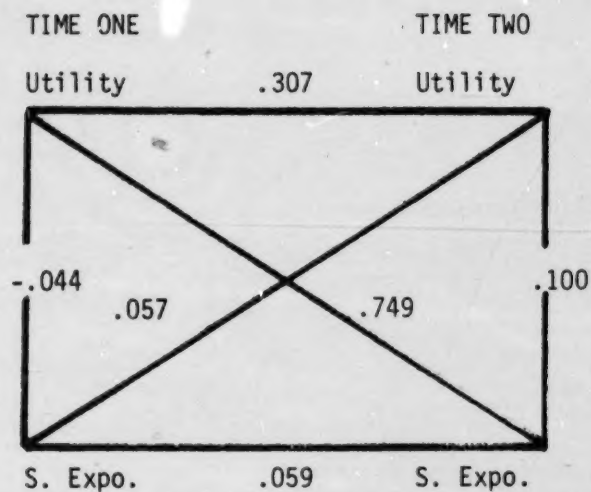
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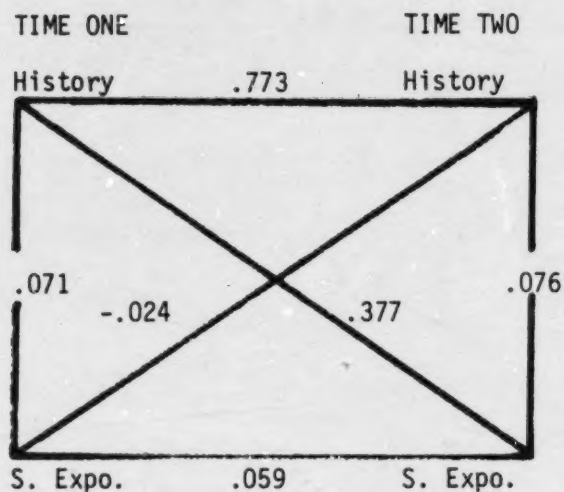
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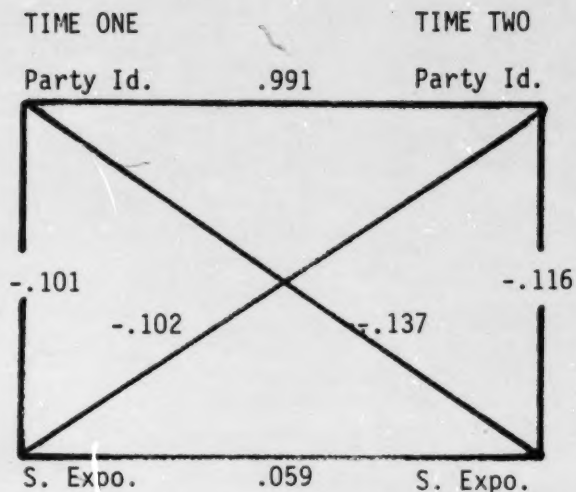
(1)



(2)



(3)



(4)

Figure 1: Cross-Lagged and Other Correlations Between Selective Exposure and Fatalism, Information Utility, Past History of Reinforcement, and Party Identification.

Table 1

SUMMARY TABLE OF ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE FOR ADDITIVE EFFECTS OF
FATALISM, INFORMATION UTILITY, HISTORY OF REINFORCEMENT, AND
PARTY IDENTIFICATION ON SELECTIVE EXPOSURE

Source of Variation	df	R ²	F	p
Past History of Reinforcement	1	.14228	15.09	<.001
Information Utility	1	.43090	68.94	<.001
Party Identification	1	.01291	1.19	>.05
Fatalism	1	.00236	0.22	>.05
Residual	84	.41155		
Totals	88	1.00000		

Table 2

SUMMARY TABLE OF ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE FOR INTERACTION EFFECTS OF
FATALISM, INFORMATION UTILITY, HISTORY OF REINFORCEMENT, AND PARTY
IDENTIFICATION ON SELECTIVE EXPOSURE

Source of Variation	df	R ²	F	p
Utility x History	1	.83129	448.39	<.001
Utility x Fatalism	1	.19987	22.73	<.001
Utility x Party Id.	1	.49770	90.17	<.001
History x Fatalism	1	.06871	6.71	<.05
History x Party Id.	1	.16232	17.63	<.001
Fatalism X Party Id.	1	.02037	1.89	>.05
Utility x History x Fatalism	1	.81401	398.28	<.001
Utility x History x Party Id.	1	.83281	453.30	<.001
History x Fatalism x Party Id.	1	.05725	5.53	<.05
Utility x History x Fatalism x Party Id.	1	.81969	413.70	<.001
Residuals	91 in each case			

Table 3

PERCENTAGE* FREQUENCIES OF PREFERENCE
FOR SOURCES OF POLITICAL INFORMATION

Sources	Time One		Time Two	
	Political Events %	Political Candidates %	Political Events %	Political Candidates %
Newspapers	59	54	61	43
Television	28	26	29	23
Magazines	12	31	19	29
Radio	22	19	14	19
Discussion	15	18	11	23
Printed Material	5	14	3	3
Books	1	2	1	1
Movies	1	1	1	4
Other	0	1	1	7

*Percentages on each column would not sum to 100% due to multiple exposure responses for selectivity.